Research Notes for Mary Ann Dempsey (1856 - 1896)

Research Overview:

Mary Ann Dempsey was born in Washington, D.C., in 1856, the daughter of Irish immigrants James Dempsey and Mary Kenney. Her life is well documented in American records, but the full structure of her birth family cannot be completely reconstructed. While several of her siblings appear by name in later records, others remain unidentified. These additional children are known only because Mary Kenney reported the total number of children she had borne in the 1900 census.

Mary Ann spent her entire life in the United States. She married James Whelan, an Irish immigrant laborer, and raised her family within the orbit of her parents and brother. Her parents and her brother James Dempsey, who had a large family of his own, appear repeatedly alongside the Whelans in census and parish records. Mary Ann's family remained physically close as the Whelans moved for work, and that proximity shaped how the household functioned over time.

Mary Ann gave birth to eleven children, six of whom died before adulthood. These deaths occurred across the years in which the family was growing and relocating, and they appear in the record alongside continued births and the survival of younger children. Loss was not confined to a single moment but accumulated over time, shaping both the size of the household and Mary Ann's daily life as a mother. The record preserves her repeatedly in the context of childbirth, burial, and caretaking, making maternal responsibility a central feature of her adult life.

Mary Ann died in 1896, only months before the death of her husband , James Whelan. By the middle of that summer, their surviving children were orphaned, and the family record shifts abruptly from a household centered on Mary Ann to fragmented documentation of the children's placements and early adult lives. Her death marks the end of a family structure that had depended heavily on her role as mother, caregiver, and connective presence within the extended Dempsey network.

Speculative Narrative:

Intentionally left blank.

Time Line:

Nov 1856 – Born in Washington, DC.[1]

10 Nov 1856– Baptism at St Patrick's Cathedral in Washington, DC. Sponsors: Philip Gilhooly and Anne Gilhooly.[2]

1857- Birth of sibling Baby 3 Dempsey in Washington, DC.[3]

In 1900, her mother, Mary Kenney Dempsey, lived at 650 1st Street in Kansas City. According to the 1900 census, she was the mother of one living child but had given birth to ten children. The census rules at that time did not count stillborn children among the total number of children born. This is why I have labeled some children as "baby 3" and so on. Six of these ten children remain unidentified.

May 1859 - Birth of brother John Dempsey at Covington, Alleghany, Virginia.[4]

Recorded on the 1860 census in Covington, Virginia, 243 miles from Washington, DC. John is not on the 1870 census. I contacted St. Francis of Assisi Church 118 N. New St. Staunton, VA 24401

office@stfrancisparish.org. Request: A copy of old family baptisms (Irish) - Fr. Tom Collins at Sacred Heart suggested I check with you because of the date of these baptisms.

[1] No source. Birth month estimated on baptism date

[2] At. Patrick Roman Catholic Church (Washington, D.C.), Baptism Register, August 1848 - September 1857, p. 256, Mary Anne Dempsey, baptized 20 November 1856; St. Patrick Catholic Church, Washington D.C.

[3] US 1900; Census Place: Kansas City Ward 6, Wyandotte, Kansas; Roll: ; Page: ; Enumeration District: "1900 Unites States Federal Census," Ancestry

[4] 1860 U.S. Federal Census (Population Schedule), Alleghany County, Virginia, p.7, Dwelling 44, Family 42, Patrick Dempsey household; digital image, "1860 Unites States Federal Census," Ancestry.

Apr 1860 - Birth and Death of brother Patrick Dempsey **(1860 - 1860)**.[5]

He was recorded on the 1860 census in Covington, Virginia, 243 miles from Washington, DC. John is missing from the 1870 census. I contacted St. Francis of Assisi Church 118 N. New St. Staunton, VA 24401 office@stfrancisparish.org

Request: A copy of old family baptisms (Irish) - Fr. Tom Collins at Sacred Heart suggested I check with you because of the date of these baptisms.

1 Jun 1860 - U.S. Census at Covington, Alleghany, Virginia.[6]

Patrick Dempsey, 29

Mary Dempsey, 28

James T Dempsey, 5

Mary A Dempsey,

John Dempsey, 1

1862 - Birth of sibling Baby 6 Dempsey in Covington, Alleghany, Virginia or Washington, DC.[7]

My hypothesis

1862 - Birth of sibling Baby 7 Dempsey in Covington, Alleghany, Virginia or Washington, DC.[8]

My hypothesis

[5] U.S. Federal Census Mortality Schedules, 1850-1880, Ancestry

[6] 1860 U.S. Federal Census (Population Schedule), Alleghany County, Virginia, p.7, Dwelling 44, Family 42, Patrick Dempsey household; digital image, "1860 Unites States Federal Census," Ancestry.

[7] No source - date based on Mary Kenney Dempsey stating she gave birth to nine children

[8] No source - date based on Mary Kenney Dempsey stating she gave birth to nine children

1862 - Birth of sibling Baby 8 Dempsey in Covington, Alleghany, Virginia or Washington, DC.[9]

My hypothesis

Before 1870 - Death of brother John Dempsey occurred at an unknown place.[10]

My hypothesis

1 Jun 1870 - U.S. Census at Jefferson, Clark, Indiana.[11]

Pat Dempsey, 38

Mary Dempsey, 38

Jas Dempsey, 15

Mary Dempsey, 13

This record marks the beginning of Mary Ann Dempsey's independently documented adult life.

16 May 1877 - Marriage at Hamilton, Tennessee, to Mary Ann Dempsey.[12]

The marriage was recorded at St Peter and Paul Catholic Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Still, the ceremony occurred at the Chattanooga Train Station, where James and Mary's father, Patrick Dempsey, was working.

[9] No source - date based on Mary Kenney Dempsey stating she gave birth to nine children

[10] No source - date based on Mary Kenney Dempsey stating she gave birth to nine children

[11] 1870 U.S. Federal Census (Population Schedule), Jefferson, Clark County, Indiana, p.398A, Dwelling 294, Family 313, Pat Dempsey household; digital image, "1870 Unites States Federal Census," Ancestry.

[12] Hamilton County (Tennessee) County Court, Marriage Licenses Volume 3, p. 76, J.H. Whelan to Mary A Dempsey married 16 May 1877; digital image, "Tennessee, County Marriages, 1790 - 1950," FamilySearch.

26 Feb 1878 - Birth of daughter Catherine Elizabeth Whalen in Chattanooga, Hamilton, Tennessee.[13]

This record places Mary Ann's parents in close proximity to her household, reinforcing the continued presence of her birth family in her adult life.

1 Jun 1880 - U.S. Census at Lone Oaks, Bates, Missouri.[14]
James Whaan - white, male, age 29, born Ireland, father born in Ireland, mother born in Ireland.

Mary Whaan - white, female, age 22, born Washington DC, father born Ireland, mother born Ireland.

Katie Whaan - white, female, age 2, born Tennessee, father born Ireland, mother born Washington DC.

Mary Whaan - white, female, age 4/12, born Kansas, father born Ireland, mother born Washington DC.

Sep 1880 - Birth of daughter Mary "Minnie" Whalen at Winfield, Cowley, Kansas.[15]

1882 - Birth of daughter Jane Whalen in Kansas.[16]

Jane is on the 1885 Kansas state census but not on the 1895 census. No baptismal or death record has been found. She was baptized at the Catholic Church, which predates Saint Thomas.

[13] St. Peter & Paul Catholic Church - Chattanooga, TN. Baptismal Record

[14] 1880 U.S. Federal Census (Population Schedule), Lone Oak, Bates County, Missouri, ED 159, Sheet 220A, Dwelling 154, Family 168, James Whaan household; digital image, "1880 Unites States Federal Census," Ancestry.

[15] Kansas City, Kansas, Mortality Record, B:35, no. 190740, Minnie Norris death, 1905; Kansas City Clerk's Office, Kansas City, Kansas; KSHS microfilm AR 4505

[16] 1885 Kansas State Census, Wyandotte, Wyandotte County, p. 148, James Whalen household; digital image, "Kansas, U.S., State Census Collection, 1855 - 1925," Ancestry.

12 Aug 1884 - Birth of son James Whalen at Armourdale, Wyandotte, Kansas.[17]

1 Mar 1885 - Kansas Census at Armourdale, Wyandotte, Kansas.[18]

James Whalen, 36

James Massen, 46

Frank Evans, 35

Mike Whalen, 45

Mary Whalen, 25

Kate Whalen, 7

Minnie Whalen, 5

Jane Whalen, 3

28 Feb 1886 - Birth of son Patrick Joseph Whalen at Armourdale, Wyandotte, Kansas.[19] His father Jacobus Whalen's ex loco Dungarvan in Hibernia.

On this baptismal record, I found the only clue for the townland of the Whelan family in Ireland.

Naturalization - This is NOT my James Whalen.[20]

[17] St. Thomas Catholic Church Baptismal Record

[18] 1885 Kansas State Census, Wyandotte, Wyandotte County, p. 148, James Whalen household; digital image, "Kansas, U.S., State Census Collection, 1855 - 1925," Ancestry.

[19] St. Thomas Catholic Church (Kansas City, Kansas), Baptismal Registers, p. 20, Number 77, Patricium Whalen, baptized 14 March 1886; provided by Fred Schreel.

[20] Doesn't belong on this timeline.

2 Feb 1888 - Birth of son John Whalen at Armourdale, Wyandotte, Kansas.[21] His father Jacobus Whalen ex loco Dungarvan in Hibernia.

23 Nov 1889 - Birth of son Michael James Whalen at Armourdale, Wyandotte, Kansas.[22]

1890, 1891 - Directory - r 818 s 4th at Kansas City, Wyandotte, Kansas.[23]

12 Feb 1892 - Birth of son Edward Paul Whalen at Armourdale, Wyandotte, Kansas.[24]

2 May 1892 – Kansas City Gazette, Kansas City, Kansas.[25]

"The infant child of Mr. and Mrs. James Whalen of South Fourth street, was attacked and frightfully bitten by a vicious dog Saturday afternoon on the back porch of the Whalen residence. The wounds are not fatal."

June 1892 - Residence

Mary's husband, James Whalen, is either working on a smelter in New Mexico or working in Texas and is not home when his son, James, drowns in the Kaw River.

11 Jun 1892 – Death of son James Whalen (1884 - 1892) Drowned in the Kaw River.[26]

---

[21] St. Thomas Catholic Church (Kansas City, Kansas), Baptismal Registers, p. 40, Number 151, Joannem Whalen, baptized 2 February 1888; provided by Fred Schreel.

[22] St. Thomas Catholic Church (Kansas City, Kansas), Baptismal Registers?

[23] Kansas City, Kansas Directory, 1890

[24] St. Thomas Catholic Church (Kansas City, Kansas), Baptismal Registers?

[25] "The South Side," The Kansas City Gazette, Kansas City, Missouri, 2 May 1892, p.3, col. 5; digital image, Newspaper.com.

[26] Kansas City Star, June 11, 1892 "A Victim of the Treacherous Kaw"

"James Whalen, a 10-Year-Old Boy, Gets Beyond His Depth at Armourdale. James Whalen, a boy 10 years old, drowned in the Kaw river at Armourdale this afternoon, about 1 o'clock. He was swimming with a number of other boys near the Eighth street bridge and got out where the water was too deep for him. He lived with his parents at 818 South Fourth street. His father is a stonemason and is at present in Texas."

Kansas City Star
June 11, 1892

A second story appeared about James Whalen's drowning:

"A Victim of the Treacherous Kaw

The classic Kaw has claimed another victim. This time it is 10-year-old Jimmie Whalen, son of the well-known Southside contractor. The deceased, though young in years, was considered a good swimmer, and according to the story of his companions, he was very much in love with that pleasant pastime.

Saturday afternoon, little Jimmie took his last swim. Near the Belt Line bridge, a springboard had been erected by the boys, and from this board, Jimmie made his fatal dive. The water was shallow, and when Jimmie shot into the water, his head stuck in the treacherous mud just long enough to cause his death. His body was recovered and removed to his parents' home, 818 South Fourth street. The last sad rites were performed yesterday when the remains were laid to rest in St. John's cemetery. The father, who is at present constructing a smelter in New Mexico, was informed of the sad bereavement."

18 Mar 1894 - Birth of son William James Whalen at Armourdale, Wyandotte, Kansas

Taken together, these birth records document nearly continuous childbearing across Mary Ann's adult life.

Before 1895 – Death of daughter Jane Whalen (1882 - before 1895), probably at Armourdale, Wyandotte, Kansas.

Jane's death record has not been found, and she is not in the 1895 KS Census.[27]

22 Feb 1895 – Death of daughter Catherine Elizabeth Whalen (1878 - 1895) at Armourdale, Wyandotte, Kansas.[28]

1895 – Kansas Census at Armourdale, Wyandotte, Kansas [29].

James Whalen, 42

Mary Whalen, 38

Patrick Whalen, 9

Mike Whalen, 5

Eddie Whalen, 3

Wm Whalen, 1

Patrick Dempster, 62

Mary Dempster, 61

Nellie Dempster, 15

Geo Smith, 28

James Irvin, 19

1895 – Death of son John Whalen **(1888 - 1895)** at Kansas City, Wyandotte, Kansas.[30]

[27] No baptismal or death record was found. Jane was mentioned on one census.

[28] Record of Mortality #1922 - Kansas City, KS Records Vol. A

[29] 1895 Kansas State Census, Ward 6, Kansas City, Wyandotte County, p.10, Dwelling 1702, Family 1727, James Whalen household; digital image, "Kansas, U.S. State Census Collection, 1855 - 1925," Ancestry

[30] No source, based on not being on the 1895 Kansas census

John died before 1895 because he was not on the Kansas census. No death record has been found.

These deaths did not occur as a single episode but accumulated over the years in which Mary Ann was raising her family."

10 May 1896 – Death at Kansas City, Wyandotte, Kansas.[31]

Mary Ann's death marks the point at which the family record shifts from a single household to separate accounts of her children."

13 July 1896 – Burial at St. John's Cemetery in Kansas City, Wyandotte, Kansas.[32] Probably in a family plot. His wife and a number of his children died, and death records show they are buried at this cemetery, but the cemetery office does not know the lot location of those burials.

Pulmonary - probably tuberculosis.

1896 – her sons Patrick, Michael, Edward, and William were sent to St. Vincent's Orphanage. The oldest surviving daughter, Minnie, was not sent to the orphanage. A letter explaining everything that happened was written to her sister-in-law, Nora Whalen Mullahy in Ohio, probably from the Kansas Dempseys. This letter is in the possession of Nora Schreel.[33]

[31] Kansas City (Kansas) City Clerk, Record of Mortality, Volume A (1892 - 1903), p.71, Mrs. Whalen, died 10 May 1896.

[32] Kansas City (Kansas) City Clerk, Record of Mortality, Volume A (1892 - 1903), p.71, Mrs. Whalen, died 10 May 1896. A Find a Grave memorial was created based on this information.

[33] Whalen 1896 Probate Journal, Whelan 1896 Guardian Appointment, Whalen 1896 Guardian Letter and Bond, Whalen 1896 Guardian Bond